



**Sister Helen Prejean** is known around the world for her tireless work against the death penalty. She has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on capital punishment and in shaping the Catholic Church's vigorous opposition to all executions.

Born on April 21, 1939, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1957. She worked as a high school teacher and served as the Religious Education Director at St. Frances Cabrini Parish in New Orleans before moving into the St. Thomas Housing Project in the early '80s.

In 1982, Sister Helen began corresponding with Patrick Sonnier, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of two teenagers. Two years later, when Patrick Sonnier was put to death in the electric chair, Sister Helen was there to witness his execution. In the following months, she became spiritual advisor to another death row inmate, Robert Lee Willie, who was to meet the same fate as Sonnier.

After witnessing these executions, Sister Helen realized that this lethal ritual would remain unchallenged unless its secrecy was stripped away, and so she sat down and wrote a book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*. That book ignited a national debate on capital punishment and spawned an Academy Award winning movie, a play, and an opera.

Sister Helen's second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, was published in 2004; and her third book, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*, in August, 2019.